

**LAND Grant Proposal
Cushman Brook Riparian Corridor
Amherst, MA**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Town of Amherst applied to the Division of Conservation Services FY2011 LAND grant program with a request of \$150,000 to purchase approximately 5.6 acres of forested upland within the Cushman Brook riparian corridor, an area of North Amherst that has one of the last contiguous blocks of forestland in town and contains several important tributaries to the Connecticut River. The current owners of the property, John and Susan Stosz, wish to preserve their land—their family farm—and have been working with Town staff for over a year to help facilitate the project. The property is bounded by Town Conservation land to the north and east, and will increase the land holdings along the brook, furthering a 30-year effort by local land trusts and the towns of Leverett and Amherst to protect this pristine resource. The entire riparian corridor is designated priority habitat for rare and endangered species, and is part of a much larger block of contiguous forested land that stretches from Amherst north into Leverett and Montague, which is a high priority for preservation in the 2009 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Conservation Context

Efforts to safeguard the natural resources along the Cushman Brook date back more than thirty years and include lands purchased by the town, state, and local land trusts, and awards from over a dozen Self-Help grants. The corridor stretches from Puffer's Pond northeast into Leverett and Shutesbury, and has been one of Amherst's highest priorities for preservation, with support from the Conservation Commission, Town Manager, and various other boards and committees. Puffer's Pond is designated living waters core habitat, while the entire Cushman Brook corridor is priority habitat for rare and endangered species. This area is intended to preserve water resources, wildlife habitat, and maintain opportunities for passive recreation in one of the few large forested areas in town. It will also help limit development in Amherst's most rural areas, a major goal identified in the recently adopted community Master Plan.

Preservation of this property will also increase opportunities for environmental education and awareness with a possible hilltop loop trail that connects to adjacent Town Conservation lands, or a trail running north through the property on an existing logging road with a trailhead on East Leverett Road.

Biodiversity and Resource Protection

The proposed conservation area within the Cushman Brook Corridor would protect a steep hillside that drains into the nearby Cushman Brook, one of the cleanest and most pristine aquatic habitats left in the Town of Amherst. The entire riparian corridor is recognized the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as either Priority and/or Estimated habitat for state-listed species, and the whole project area is recognized as living waters critical supporting watersheds. The brook is a prime fishery with native brook trout, and there is minimal development in the upper part of the watershed. According to the Connecticut River 5-Year Watershed Action Plan 2002-07, Cushman Brook is also at risk. It is one of the "tributaries that has surface water supply development and groundwater aquifers with several public supply wells [that] were identified as possibly experiencing flow modification." (page 31). Protecting this forested hillside, which drains into Cushman Brook, will maintain water quality and supply. The ***Historic and Archeological Resources of the Connecticut River Valley*** also lists the area as the location of a Native American trail referenced on Map 4 of this publication.

Threat of Development

Although the owners of the property are committed to the preservation of their land, the cost of foresting and farming, and the uncertainty of the present economy, presents them with challenges for the future. Working with a local developer, the property owners recently determined that 3-4 house lots could be located on this site.